

Inquest On Dead Panthers Opens Up Many Questions

Only police, coroner's office witnesses gave evidence
but their statements left issues open. *York Gazette*

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Chicago—The finding last Wednesday of a special coroner's jury that the deaths of two Black Panthers in a predawn police raid Dec. 4 were "justified" were based, the verdict noted, "solely and exclusively" on testimony presented by the police and the coroner's office.

But that evidence itself appeared to raise a number of questions about the incident, which the police have described as a gun battle lasting at least 10 minutes, touched off by shotgun blasts from the occupants of the small West Side apartment.

Members of the Black Panthers declined to testify because of pending criminal trials.

Among the unexplained points raised by the testimony were the following:

—A police firearms expert testified ammunition recovered from the apartment were the shell casings of five .32-caliber bullets. He testified that these did not match any of the alleged Panther weapons the police say they found and that the list of police weapons carried on the raid did not include any of .32 caliber.

—The same police expert, John M. Sadunas, testified that none of the 130-odd expended shell casings and slugs recovered from the apartment matched 17 of the 19 weapons the police say they seized.

—Sadunas testified that three shotgun cartridge casings the police said they found in the apartment matched the remaining two shotguns. Yet no slugs or shotgun pellets were recovered from the area where the shotguns were supposed to have been fired.

—Although the police raiders repeatedly testified that there had been a number of shotgun blasts directly out of the doorways of the two bedrooms, no pellets or slugs were recovered from the opposite walls, and visitors to the apartment saw no marks on the walls.

—Police Sgt. Daniel Groth, who led the raid, testified that there was no tear gas "available," although the raiders had drawn three shotguns and a submachine gun from a special weapons arsenal.

—Sergeant Groth also testified that no fingerprints were taken from any

of the weapons the police said they seized.

—All 14 policemen who took part in the raid testified that they had virtually no prior knowledge of the Black Panthers, although they are assigned to the Special Prosecutions unit of the State's Attorney's office, which was set up last spring with a specific mission of keeping an eye on black youth groups and street gangs.

—Despite the heavy volume of fire described by the police, the only injuries they received came when one policeman cut his hand breaking a window with his pistol and another was grazed by gunfire coming through a wall, apparently fired by the police.

Testimony about the three shots fired into Fred Hampton, who was the Illinois chairman of the Panthers, raised a number of questions about the path of the bullets that were fired and the nature of the wounds.